

Message Text

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SUBJ: INDOCHINA REFUGEE PROBLEM

1. DURING INITIAL COURTESY CALL ON INTERIOR MINISTER LEK, AMBASSADOR USED OCCASION TO DISCUSS INDOCHINA REFUGEE SITUATION.

2. AMBASSADOR TOLD GENERAL LEK THAT WE FULLY UNDERSTOOD THE PROBLEMS BROUGHT BY THE HEAVY INFLOW OF REFUGEES FROM INDOCHINA TO THAILAND. HE EXPRESSED APPRECIATION FOR THE CONTINUED RTG EFFORTS IN ACCEPTING THESE REFUGEES AND CARING FOR THEM. THE AMBASSADOR SAID HE SPECIFICALLY WANTED TO REITERATE THAT USG INTENDS TO CONTINUE ITS SUPPORT FOR THE RTG AND UNHCR EFFORTS IN HANDLING THIS DEEPLY SENSITIVE AND HUMANITARIAN PROBLEM. THE AMBASSADOR NOTED OUR FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE UNHCR EFFORT, OUR PAST REFUGEE ACCEPTANCE PROGRAMS, AND OUR INTENTION TO MAINTAIN A SIGNIFICANT REFUGEE ACCEPTANCE PROGRAM IN THE FUTURE.

3. IN THAT CONTEXT, THE AMBASSADOR RAISED THE QUESTION OF RESETTLEMENT IN THAILAND OF SOME OF THE REFUGEES. HE NOTED THE LARGE NUMBER STILL COMING INTO THE COUNTRY AND POINTED OUT THAT ANY EVENTUAL RESOLUTION OF THE

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REFUGEE PROBLEM WOULD INVOLVE SOME RESETTLEMENT IN THAILAND.

4. LEK INDICATED HIS APPRECIATION FOR THE POINTS MADE BY THE AMBASSADOR. WHILE INDICATING THAT DEPUTY INTERIOR MINISTER GENERAL PREM WAS CHARGED WITH FOLLOWING THE REFUGEE PROBLEM, LEK SAID THAT HE

PERSONALLY UNDERSTOOD THE NEED TO CONSIDER SOME LOCAL RESETTLEMENT OPTIONS. LEK SAID HE HAS STRESSED THE NEED TO FIND ADEQUATE LAND FOR THE REFUGEES. AS DEFENSE MINISTER HE HAD EXPLAINED THE NEED TO SERIOUSLY CONSIDER FINDING REMOTE AREAS IN THE COUNTRY WHERE REFUGEES COULD BE EVENTUALLY RESETTLED, FOR INSTANCE HIGHLAND AREAS FOR THE HMONG. IN THE CASE OF THE LAO THE PROBLEM OF LAND WAS MORE DIFFICULT SINCE THEY LIKE THE THAI WERE LOWLAND FARMERS.

5. THE AMBASSADOR THANKED LEK FOR HIS POSITIVE AND CONSTRUCTIVE VIEWS AND NOTED OUR WILLINGNESS TO ASSIST WITH OTHERS IN ANY RESETTLEMENT EFFORTS THE THAI MIGHT DECIDE ON. HE NOTED THE VICE PRESIDENT'S OFFER OF DOLLARS TWO MILLION FOR INITIAL STUDIES AND/OR PILOT PROJECTS IS AN INDICATION OF OUR READINESS TO ASSIST.

6. COMMENT: GENERAL LEK WAS CAREFUL TO MAKE CLEAR THAT HE WAS SPEAKING PERSONALLY AND THAT HE HAD NOT YET IMMERSED HIMSELF IN THE REFUGEE PROBLEM. CONSEQUENTLY, HIS REMARKS WERE, AS HE NOTED, PERSONAL. AT THE SAME TIME, HE SPOKE EASILY AND DEMONSTRATED A WILLINGNESS TO ENTER INTO A SERIOUS DIALOGUE ON RESETTLEMENT WITH NONE OF THE DEFENSIVENESS WHICH HAD BEEN CHARACTERISTIC OF THAI OFFICIALS EARLIER IN THE YEAR. ABRAMOWITZ

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